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SKIPPED

STITCHES

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"OLD RED CRADLE"



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SKIPPED STITCHES

VERSES

—BY—

ANNA J. GRANNISS

AUTHOR OF THE

“OLD RED CRADLE”

SUNG IN

“THE OLD HOMESTEAD.”

Sixth Thousand.

KEENE, N. H.:

DARLING & COMPANY, BOOK AND JOB PRINTERS.

1898.

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TO H. E. P.

*If I could find in field, or wood, some flow'r,
Some nameless flow'r, sweeter than all the rest,
Yielding its bloom and fragrance ev'ry hour,
Then, leaving half its sweetness unexpressed*

*In its deep chalice, closed in petals white,
Which, at the lightest breath would lean apart,
And so disclose a glowing roseate light,
Some lovely thing had kindled at its heart;*

*If I could find such flow'r, in field, or wood,
While yet its petals hung with early dew,
I'd pluck it up, and name it Gratitude,
And make all haste to offer it to you.*

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TO MY MOTHER

I LOVINGLY DEDICATE

MY HOME-SONGS

AND SHOULD THIS LITTLE VENTURE FIND ITS WAY TO

ANY OF MY

FELLOW TOILERS

WILL THEY PLEASE ACCEPT A FEW

SKIPPED STITCHES

AS SPECIALLY DEDICATED TO THEM.

A. J. G.



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PRELUDE.

The sun comes up, and the day is crowned
With its face turned toward the west;
And all day long in the mill is found
The bustle of toil's unrest.

The steam sings out to the silent steel,
Till pulley and shaft reply;
The thread unwinds from its mimic reel,
And slips through the needle's eye.

Click, click, and over the long white track,
The stitches begin to go
Like tiny steps where none turn back
In crossing a field of snow.

Or whether the softest south winds blow,
Or the north grows dark with fears,
While the changing seasons come and go,
I'm stitching away the years,

And the great world never asks, or cares,
What may go in with the seams;
Whether bits of song, or broken prayers,
Or only a toiler's dreams.

But something born of the toil and grind,
Keeps pleading to be confessed;
It cries from its cradle in the mind,
And it will not let me rest.

And so, when the days and seams are long,
When the pulleys creak and moan,
I just skip a stitch and sing a song,
But the world has never known

That it soothes the ache of hurts and wrongs;
That brighter the needle gleams,
In threading life through the simple songs,
That go tucked away in seams.

But the seams grow frayed, and old, and worn,
And the little songs fall out;
They know they are ill-clad waifs forlorn
That nobody cares about.

And they bring me little good or gain,
In their ragged bits of rhyme,
Save, as they sing amid toil and pain,
Of the rest in "aftertime";

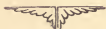
When toil is done, and the day kneels down
With its worn face turned away,
While cool hands take off its fevered crown,
And slip on its robe of gray,

Then, up and down thro' the busy mill,
Its swift wheels begin to slow,
And the loud pulse of the steam grows still
In the engine-room below.

And the old bell, waiting in its tower
For pulley and shaft to cease,
Rings the first stroke of the closing hour,
For the toiling hands' release.

And then, from the great deserted rooms,
The grim shadows chase the light;
The dim corners quickly fill with glooms,
And the mill "shuts down" for night.

For night—when over these long white seams,
The darkness at last shall fall,
The night will find, for one toiler's dreams,
Skipped Stitches, and that is all.



Skipped Stitches.

SET TOIL TO A TUNE.

Set your toil to a tune, aye, a happy tune,
And sing as you hoe, my laddie;
Set your toil to a tune, as sweet as the June,
And sing as you sew, my lassie,
For toil is pleasure,
When set to measure
Of mystical rhythms and runes,
And common-place toil
On fabric or soil,
Can be set to a thousand tunes.

Set tunes to the stitches, and sing as you sew,
Aye, sing while the lads, fair lassies,
Set tunes to the furrows and sing as they hoe,—
Songs lie asleep in the grasses!
For the heart that sings,
The hours fly on wings
Of mystical rune and rhythm,
And carry the tunes
Of a year of Junes,
And the glad heart of the toiler with 'em.

SONGS AND BURRED NEEDLES.

SONG.

We count it a pleasure to earn our bread!
First the leaves are green, then yellow and red —
By our daily toil we are housed and fed,
From the leaf in bud, till the leaves are shed;
 The thread keeps winding off from its reel,
 If it's smooth and strong then all goes "weel",
But a knot stops close to the needle's eye,
It's a little thing, but it can't go by —
 A dry leaf clicks at the window-pane,
 We clip the knot and thread up again;
Yes, we like the taste of our hard-earned bread,
Let the leaves be green, or yellow and red,
Or the trees quite bare, with the last leaf shed.

NEEDLE NO. 1.

That cricket's singing almost frenzies me;
 For half an hour it's piped the self-same strain;
The worst it used to do was make me sad,
 But now, it's driving needles thro' my brain.

You know the cricket rarely sings till fall.
 By that I know the summer's almost dead,
And yet, I've barely had two buttercups —
 No wonder, then, its singing hurts my head.

I used to love the crickets when a child,
The dear brown hoppers, but I then hopped, too,
And had my share of summer buttercups,
And ev'ry other wild flower, that I knew.

I find the same things have a difference
When heard, or felt, at widely different times —
I used to call just jingles poetry,
But I know better now, and call them rhymes.

I used to think that heaven would tire me out
With endlessness — I hope I've been forgiven,
For now, indeed, I find I've grown so tired,
My sweetest hope is that long rest in heaven.

Diverted by the years, all former things
Find newer meanings or become estranged;
By this I know my soul has not stood still,
In that my old ideals have been changed.

SONG.

We are the toilers who earn their rest;
Oh, the year is growing old!
The sun is setting far southwest;
Oh, the winds are growing bold!
The winter is long and hard at best;
Oh, the winter is hard and cold!
And what shall we do when cold weather comes?
And what shall we do to warm our poor homes?
If the thread will slip thro' the needle's eye,
Let cold weather come, for warmth we can buy.

We'll list the windows, and list the doors;
We'll lay bright rugs on the kitchen floors;
Sing, needle, click and sing,
The coldest winter must yield to spring!

NEEDLE NO. 2.

A child is sobbing somewhere up the street,
Its sense of justice wronged, it wails and cries;
The dear Lord only knows how it may weep
From keener sense of wrong, before it dies.

Poor little waif! I'd love to take him up
And comfort him, and kiss away his hurts;
His mother has to earn her bread and his,
By making other children bibs and skirts.

He has to get along as best he can;
Brave baby soul, he never asked to come —
He may be one of heaven's own astray —
The infant Christ was born without a home.

I wonder if such childhood makes the man
More truly just, more pitifully kind
To little fellows crying on the street
Because they've been left out, or left behind.

Or if instead, he turns against the world,
Ignoring all it gives of later good,
And, by supreme indifference, thinks to
Revenge his own neglected babyhood.

SONG.

Oh, we are of those who toil and trust,
Others may, too, but the toiler must;
God has not gone to some distant star,
He's in the mills where the toilers are.
We know he smiles on us every one,
For the sake of Christ, the carpenter's son;
None other could hear in the noisy mill,
But "God hears a thought," and heaven grows still
While he measures the tears and counts the sighs
Of the anxious hearts lifting up their cries —
Oh! what shall we do when our loved ones fail?
Oh! what shall we do when their cheeks grow pale?
And how shall we buy them fresh fruits and flowers,
If we 'tend to their wants in the working hours?
But how can we leave them sick and alone?
Oh, how we toilers do love our own!
All we can do is to toil and trust.
Others may, too, but the toiler must;
And God remembers, and He is just.

NEEDLE NO. 3.

Great men have lived and died, before to-day,
Leaving the lore their minds had bred and nurst;
But babes cannot begin where they left off,
They have to lisp and learn their letters first.
One man invents a thing, and puts it by,
And dies before he brings it to the test;
Another finds it good, but incomplete,
Improves upon't, then he, too, goes to rest.

For some are blind in this, some lame in that,
It keeps the world from getting on too fast,
And wins the Present's due acknowledgment
For all it owes the venerable Past.

Indeed it ought to stimulate the man
To do some worthy work to leave behind
With this gray-headed banker of the world,
Where ev'ry man's a debtor to his kind.

'Tis strange to think of time so far remote
There was no reverend Past to draw upon;
But then God was, He is, and He will be
God of the great world's night-fall, as its dawn.

SONG.

Oh! the wearisome week! How slow it wears!
The days are so long and so full of cares,
There is hardly time for our hurried prayers,
But God hears those,
And only He knows
Just how much it means to stop and pray,
At either end of the toiler's day;
It's dark in the morning; it's dark at night;
How *do* our homes look in the broad day light?
Are the little ones' faces sad or bright?
Had we noticed the mother's hair was white?
The needles buzz in monotonous hum;—
Oh! the first bell-stroke, will it ever come?
It's getting dark, and it's hard to see,
And I know my own are needing me.

The great wheels throb, and the pulleys groan,
Till they seem to sound like a human moan,
And the heart stands still with a sudden fear,
Oh, how is it hearts beat, year after year?
Ah! this is too dreary a song I know,
But this is sometimes — 'tis not always so.

NEEDLE NO. 4.

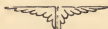
I hear the turtle singing in the land!

The longest woe or winter wears away;
And I at last have come to understand,
That life is better, taken day by day.

If we recall the past, and wail and cry
Over lost joys, or some remembered pain,
The present, needs must weep in sympathy,
And so lose all its joy, and nothing gain.

While if the future we would penetrate,
And sit and wonder what the end will be,
It's more than likely we shall 'rise to find
Our chances of success in jeopardy.

So life is better taken day by day,
Moment by moment rather, from God's hand.
The wilderness is traversed step by step,
By those who would go up and take the land.



THE MESSAGE.

I sent it far out on the midnight air;
A great voiceless wish, an unspoken prayer.
I know what I said when I sent it out,
As I watched it hover and beat about,
And then cross the dark mountain toward the sea —
“ O, sometime my wish *will* be granted me,
And sometime my prayer *will* be answered me,
From over the mountain and over the sea ” !

And I told the spirit of air and wind
To carry my message, to seek and find
Its answer, then over the mountain's track
Come swiftly, and bear me the answer back.
And I had sweet dreams, sweet as dreams could be,
Of my voiceless prayer being answered me,
Of my one wild wish being granted me,
From over the mountain and over the sea.

I opened the window at dead of night;
All the ground with winter's snow lay white —
Had I slept in the lap of bygone springs ?
Did I dream of the beat of rapid wings ?
O, my friend, the one prayer I breathed out to thee,
Is its answer winging its way to me ?
Is it bringing pardon and peace to me
From over the mountain and over the sea ?

It was night, and the ground lay white with snow,
And the last bird had vanished months ago,
But straight from the way where the day-star springs,
Through the still night air came the rush of wings;
And a bird, unknown on this side of the sea,
Fluttered in on weary white wings to me.
A living message of peace for me,
From over the mountain and over the sea.

The wish I sent out on the midnight air,
The message I breathed in that voiceless prayer,
Was the anguished burden, "Forgive! Forgive!
Oh, my wronged friend, if thou still dost live!"
Did the waves of the night air carry my plea?
Did the unknown bird bear fast and free
His answer of pardon and peace to me,
From over the mountain and over the sea?

The feverish dream of a burdened mind? —
An invisible waif of the winter's wind? —
Ah — the open sash in that morning's chill;
And the strange bird dead on the window-sill —
With the sweet, sudden sense of a mind set free,
Were pledges my sin was forgiven me.
Strange tokens of pardon and peace to me,
From over the mountain and over the sea.

Came news of death from an Eastern land,
With these words, writ by a comrade's hand:
"At the hour of midnight the message came.
'I forgive,' he said, then breathed your name,

And died." Oh, is the soul both sides of the sea ?
What was the white wonder that came to me ?
Had his spirit crossed over to answer me,
Ere its last long flight above mount and sea ?



APRIL.

April laughed, and threw a kiss;
Then afraid it seemed amiss,
Quick she dropped a shining tear,
And it straightway blossomed here;
Seeing this, she then threw more,
Crying harder than before —
A tear for ev'ry kiss she threw;
From ev'ry tear a blossom grew,
Till she laughing, ran away,
And left her flowers all to May.



A CHILD ASLEEP.

A sinner sat in the room at night
Where a sweet child lay asleep,
And strange tears came to the weary eyes,
That had been unused to weep;
The mind went back to another time,
When she lay her childish head,
Aye, in just such happy innocence
On her own low trundle bed.

She seemed to feel the good-night kiss,
The hand upon brow and hair,
And she heard her mother's gentle tones,
With her own voice lisping prayer;
Then the fountain of her heart o'erflowed,
And swept through those evil years,
Until all their bitter wrong and sin
Dissolved in repentant tears.

She knelt and prayed — glad angelic hands
Once anew their harp strings sweep;
Babes may hear such music in their dreams,
For the child smiled in her sleep.
Then a holy Presence filled the room,
And breathed low the word "Forgiven"!
But the sinner heard, and lifted up
Her face toward God and heaven.

The redeeming miracle was wrought!
Then the still night wore away,
And a beautiful new soul beheld
In the east the breaking day.
What the song and sermon had not done,
For the sick soul sin-defiled,
God's spirit did in the silent room,
By means of a sleeping child.

WHERE THE VIOLETS GROW.

I know a place where the violets grow,
As blue as the summer sky,
And I'll tell you if you care to know,
For you would not pass them by.

You remember where the lilies grow
With the delicate meadow-rue?
It's early now, but before you know
They will ring their bells for you:

Well, that is the lot you have to cross,
Then follow the old stone wall;
It's nearly covered with speckled moss,
There, under the button-ball.

And it's there two tiny pathways meet —
One leads to — I don't know where;
The other will choke with meadow-sweet,
In the hot mid-summer air.

But take it now, and follow the brook,
As it runs along the ridge;
You'll notice some cresses in a nook
Growing somewhere, near the bridge.

And then come the pussy-willow trees,
Where the boughs bend over so,
They dip the water, then lift again,
Whenever the light winds blow.

Farther on, the brook bends suddenly,
With a gurgling mur-m-u-r-r-um,
As if it were turning back to see
Why the willows did not come.

But the violets? Where do they grow?
Stop at the bend of the brook,
Shut your eyes and take three steps or so,
Then open them wide, and look.

There they are — blue, yes, blue as the sky
When deepest in love with June;
When all nature sets her melody
To the rarest of sweet tune.

Why, they seem to make the very air
A violet-colored mist,
And you'll almost think as you stand there,
That the earth and sky have kissed.

When I came upon them in the dew,
I think in my first surprise,
I thought that a bit of heaven's own blue
Had fallen before my eyes.

I found them day before yesterday,
When out for a tramp — and oh,
It is lovely all along the way -
To where the violets grow.

MY GUEST.

The day is fixed that there shall come to me
 A strange mysterious guest;
The time I do not know, he keeps the date,
So all I have to do is work and wait,
 And keep me at my best,
And do my common duties patiently.

I've often wondered if that day would break
 Brighter than other days
That I might know, or wrapped in some strange gloom,
And if he'd find me waiting in my room,
 Or busy with life's ways,
With tired hands, and weary eyes that ache.

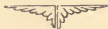
For many years I've known that he would come,
 And so have watched for him;
And sometimes even said "He will come soon!"
Yet mornings pass followed by afternoon,
 With twilights dusk and dim,
And silent night-times, when the world is dumb.

But he *will* come, and find me here or there,
 It does not matter when,
For when he comes, I know that he will take
In his, these very hands of mine that ache,
 (They will be idle then,)
Just folded may be, with a silent prayer.

Yes, he whom I expect has been called Death,
And once he is my guest,
Nothing disturbs of what has been, or is;
I'll leave the world's loud company, for his,
As that which seemeth best,
And none may hear the tender words he saith

As we pass out, my royal guest and I,
As noiseless as he came;
For naught will do, but I must go with him
And leave the house I've lived in closed and dim,
It only bears my name,
I've known I should not need it, by and by.

And so I sleep and wake, I toil and rest,
Knowing when he shall come,
My Elder Brother will have sent for me,
Bidding him say, that they especially
Have need of me at home,
And so, I shall go gladly with my guest.



HER DOMINION.

She never sat upon a throne
With a scepter in her hand,
And never to my knowledge
Has she owned a foot of land;
But I've often sat and watched her
Through the tidy window screen,
And I know in her dominion,
She's a veritable queen.

Who? why, my little neighbor
With the gingham apron on,
Or a bit of fluted muslin
When the morning's work is done.
Yes; she rents a tidy cottage
Right here across the street,
Where she keeps the windows shining
And the door-yard fresh and neat.

All the walk is gaily bordered
With petunias and phlox,
And the door is always opened
For every one who knocks.
Where, unless she is preceded
By a little laughing elf,
With sweet, unconscious dignity,
She waits on the door herself.

Her subjects ? why, her children,
Just as loyal as can be,
And the way they wait upon her
Is quite beautiful to see;
While she keeps them glad and happy
With the smile upon her face,
And teaches them sweet manners,
By her own habitual grace.

There's a handsome, manly fellow
Goes off early in the day,
Coming back again, as daylight
Just begins to fade away;
He's gallant as he is handsome —
Could a sovereign ask for more,
Than the homage which he pays her,
When she meets him at the door ?

Why, her home is her dominion !
Home where love is all the law;
Where no harshly uttered mandate
Her wee subjects over-awe.
But I'm talking of my neighbors,
I'm ashamed as I can be,
I've been peeping through my shutters,
And they've just sat down to tea.

I can hear their cheerful chatter,
With soft laughter now and then,
And I say, the dear Lord bless them.
Ten times over, and again ;

TO MY MOTHER.

For it does me good to watch them,
Seems so cozy, and all that,
And I've nothing much to 'tend to,
But my knitting and my cat.



TO MY MOTHER.

My wish for thee, whose tireless love
Alike could chasten and approve:
My wish is that thy life might be
As full of joy as love for me.

My hope for thee is like a star
That shines beyond where tempests are:
My hope for thee, first loved and best,
Is one long day of perfect rest.

My prayer for thee who taught me pray,
Would swing the gates of heaven away,
Until the light of heaven appear
To shine across thy pathway here.

My love for thee — could that obtain
A healing balsam for thy pain,
Ah, then it were already thine,
Could it be bought with love of mine.

THE OLD RED CRADLE.

Take me back to the days when the old red cradle rocked,
In the sunshine of the years that are gone;
To the good, old, trusty days, when the door was never locked,
And we slumbered unmolested till the dawn.

I remember of my years I had numbered almost seven,
And the old cradle stood against the wall—
I was youngest of the five, and two were gone to heaven,
But the old red cradle rocked us all.

And if ever came a day when my cheeks were flushed and hot,
When I did not mind my porridge or my play,
I would clamber up its side and the pain would be forgot,
When the old red cradle rocked away.

It has been a hallowed spot where I've turned through all the
years,
Which have brought me the evil with the good,
And I turn again to-night, aye, and see it through my tears,
The place where the dear old cradle stood.

By its side my father paused with a little time to spare,
And the care-lines would soften on his brow,
Ah! 'twas but a little while that I knew a father's care,
But I fancy in my dreams I see him now.

By my mother it was rocked when the evening meal was laid,
And again I seem to see her as she smiled—
When the rest were all in bed, 'twas there she knelt and
prayed,
By the old red cradle and her child.

Aye, it cradled one and all, brothers, sisters in it lay,
And it gave me the sweetest rest I've known.
But to-night the tears will flow, and I let them have their way,
For the passing years are leaving me alone.
And it seems of those to come, I would gladly give them all,
For a slumber as free from care as then,
Just to wake to-morrow morn where the rising sun would fall,
'Round the old red cradle once again.
But the cradle long has gone and the burdens that it bore,
One by one have been gathered to the fold,
Still the flock is incomplete, for it numbers only four,
With one left out straying in the cold.
Heaven grant again we may in each other's arms be locked,
Where no sad tears of parting ever fall;
God forbid that one be lost, that the old red cradle rocked;
And the dear old cradle rocked us all.

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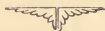


AN OCCULTATION.

So many times, I've seen the great round moon.
Creep slowly from behind yon old mill-roof,
And with a kindly face look in at me,
Still bending o'er my uncompleted task,
And then, with tender grace withdraw herself.
To climb again the stairway of the heavens,
Up to her chamber, all alight with stars,
And hung with white cloud-draperies to hide
A little of her loveliness.

One night,
'Twas when the moon was new, and in the west
Hung high a crescent beautiful, I saw
Aldebaran draw near, and seem to pause
Upon the shadowed disc, then slip from sight
Between the shining points, as if to hide
Him from the twin stars of the Hyades.
(Instinctively I laid a finger on
My lips, a-hush — and simultaneously
The charmed night held itself so still, I heard
An old Pine drop a needle on the ground,)
And soon, I saw him peep from underneath
The shining rim, and take his place again,
And then right merrily go down the west,
To put the little stars to bed.

Wise men,
Who know the names, and courses of the stars,
As I know names, and blooming times of flow'rs,
Called what I saw an occultation, else
I might have thought it just a good-night game
Of peek-a-boo, played by that merry group
Of Hyades.



THE MASSACRE OF THE ROSES.

The Lady Rose and her family,
In the early part of June,
Had planned for a grand rose festival,
To be held the next full moon.

The Lady Rose, of her family
Was as proud as proud could be;
“Some shall wear yellow, and some wear red,
And some shall wear white,” said she.
“And some shall be dressed in full pink skirts,
Some in salmon’s palest hue,
And some in crimson, and each shall wear
A real pearl-o’-the-dew.”

With their lovely costumes partly on,
They chatted, as roses will,
And the moon was half way up the sky,
When they set the last wee frill.

First, the Lady Rose herself stepped out,
Leaning lightly on the wind,
Then the half-blown belles, and timid buds,
Came in trios close behind.

The place belonged to Miss Marguerite,
She had fenced and hedged it well,
And just where that bold Jack Frost came in,
Why, no one could ever tell.

But right in the midst of the festival,
They all felt his icy breath,
And the Lady Rose and her family
Were frightened almost to death.

They gathered their dainty flounces up,
And prepared to run away,
But in icy tones that froze their hearts,
He commanded them to stay.

The timid buds in their green slashed coats,
He pinched *them* till they were black,
And if any did make their escape,
They have never dared come back.

Well, Miss Marguerite walked out next day.
Yes; and afterwards she said
That every rose at the festival,
Was black in the face and — dead.



FRAGMENTS.

A broken song — It had dropped apart
Just as it left the singer's heart,
And was never whispered upon the air,
Only breathed into the vague "Somewhere".

A broken prayer — Only half said
By a tired child at his trundle bed;
While asking Jesus his soul to keep,
With parted lips, he fell fast asleep.

A broken life — Hardly half told
When it dropped the burden it could not hold —
Of these lives, and songs, and prayers half done,
God gathers the fragments every one.



THE AGED ONES.

Make the way smooth for the aged feet;
The path has been hard they've had to tread,
And they shrink from what they yet may meet,
For the way looks dark that lies ahead.

Make the work light for the feeble hands,
Once they were fair and soft as your own;
But with patiently welding Love's strong bands,
Into the hands hard seams have grown.

Soften the light for the aching eyes,
Grown tired, perhaps, in their watch o'er you,
While tenderly hushing with lull-a-bys,
Through silent hours when you never knew.

Make the weight light for the weary arm,
'Tis tired, with many a day's work done;
With passing so often 'twixt you and harm,
Let it "lean hard" on your stronger one.

Smooth the hair tenderly off the brow,
Something has left deep furrows there;
The mother's care you would so miss now,
Has cut those lines, and blanched the hair.

And kiss sometimes the quivering lips,
Thousands of times have they kissed you,
Saying, "No nectar the bee e'er sips,
Is sweeter from flower-bells filled with dew."

The ear has grown dull with each passing year,
And the voice grows weak it feels and owns,
But once, 'twas only a mother's ear
Could tell the language of baby-tones.

Make the heart glad by your thoughtful care,
Long has it thought and planned for you,
Beating with many a silent prayer,
And self-denial you never knew.

Make the bed soft for the tired frame
Just a few more times, — a very few, —
Shade the winds from the flickering flame
Till the thread of life shall have burned in two.



THE LOST JEWELS.

"Have you seen or heard of my jewels?
Came you by the meadow path,
Where I challenged the merry maiden
With handfuls of aftermath?
Saw you aught that shone in the grasses
With a rarely lustrous hue?"

"We came by the path thro' the meadow,
And saw but the morning dew."

“ Came you round thro’ the daisy acre,
And over the wild rose stile,
Where Flora sat resting her basket,
And chatting with me the while ?
Saw you aught that lay in the pathway,
That shone with a pearly gleam ? ”

“ Aye, we crossed the stile just after you,
And saw but a stray sunbeam.”

“ Did you pass by the clump of alders,
Where the shade lay dark and cool ?
(I was there when the village children
Passed by on their way to school.)
Saw you in the shade of the alders
That which might have been my gems ? ”

“ Nay; we saw but the purple berries
That hung on their wine-red stems.”

“ But has no one found them — my treasures,
My fair pearls so lustrous white ?
They were lost somewhere in the morning,
And now it is almost night.
Surely, some one can find my jewels,
Or their like, in some fair clime.”

“ Nay; for the gems you lost this morning,
Were the precious pearls of time.”

THE BOOK WITH THE QUAIN'T RED LEATHER COVERS.

The old kitchen of my childhood,
With its fire-place and its delf,
Was made hallowed by the presence
Of the Book upon the shelf,
Where for years its quaint old covers
Caught the firelight's ruddy flame,
For the Book and "old red cradle"
Were there long before I came.

It has shared a place beside me
In many a childish nap,
For my mother used to rock me
With it resting on her lap;
And e'en now, through years of changes,
Tender memories are stirred
By the rocking of a cradle
Or the reading of the Word.

When its weight was quite too heavy
For my hands to hold with care,
It was opened out before me,
On a low-backed wooden chair;
While I read of Paul and Silas,
With their feet fast in the stocks —
Spelled the words, demurely seated
On an old cracked candle box.

TWO ROOMS.

I've a picture of my mother,
 (I can close my eyes and see)
Bending o'er those sacred pages,
 With us all about her knee,
And we never missed her blessing
 When the evening prayers were said,
And she closed the leather covers,
 While she tucked us up in bed.

There's no cradle gently rocking
 On the old home kitchen floor,
And no children just at night-fall,
 Press in thro' the open door;
But the dear old family Bible,
 Teaching its eternal truth,
Is the one unchanged possession,
 Which outlives a vanished youth.



TWO ROOMS.

A beautiful room with tinted walls;
A bust where the colored sunlight falls,
A lace-hung bed with a satin fold,
A lovely room, all blue and gold —
 And weariness.

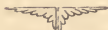
A quaint old room with rafters bare;
A low white bed, a rocking-chair,
A book, a stalk where a flower had been,
An open door, and all within
 Peace and content.

THE DEATH OF THE LEAVES.

Wet, wet, wet, lie the leaves !
Loose from the boughs where they burned and blushed,
Now they are lying all limp and crushed,
Their mellow music is drowned and hushed
In the great down-pour of the autumn rain. ♫
I watched them yesterday thro' the lane
Drifting, dallying, dallying, drifting,
Resting, rallying, lighting, lifting —
Over the hill and down the hollow,
Rustling gaily, " Who'll come and follow ?
We are going to find the swallow ! "

The north wind started them on the track,
In a giddy whirl they came rushing back,
Hither and thither the wild wind's game,
So all the day long they went and came ;
Spreading like beautiful bits of flame
Along the roadside, and through the lane —
Quenched to-night by a whole day's rain —
Drenched thro' each fibre and fine-drawn vein,
For death in Nature the great sky grieves,
And rains its tears on the fallen leaves,
Wet, wet, wet, lie the leaves !

Dead, dead, dead, lie the leaves !
Some, caught on hedges, hang torn and brown ;
Some lie in by-ways, some in the town,
Wherever the great rain beat them down.
Pressing on pavements their delicate prints,
Lighting the gutter with pale yellow tints —
Yesterday, falling, fluttering, flying,
To-night they are lying still, and dying —
Huddled in heaps 'round the tree-trunks, dead,
While great bare branches stretch overhead,
And seem to whisper, as if they said,
“ Let the gray sky weep, a tree ne'er grieves,
Sighing all winter for its lost leaves !
We push them off as the year grows old,
And our roots strike deeper for frost and cold,
While the dead leaves mix with the mother-mould,
And a strange new impulse thrills us through,
Till Nature revives and skies are blue,
And the old leaves live again in the new ! ”
'Tis a beautiful truth the old tree weaves
From its fallen garland of faded leaves.
Dead, dead, dead, lie the leaves !



A PART IN THE PLAN.

Because my life is what it is,
Shall I despair,
And offer up bitter complaints
Instead of prayer ?
Because my life is what it is,
I may instead
Be drawn the closer unto God,
And comforted ;

And the comfort wherewith He comforteth,
Makes precious every need,
And life as it is, if He wants it so,
Is precious to me indeed.

Because my life is what it is,
Heav'n seems more sweet,
And ev'ry joy that finds me out,
I rise to meet
With keen surprise, because my life
Is what it is,
The least in that stupendous plan
Of Deity's.

For my part in the plan is but weakness,
My place in the structure small —
But what a thing for a worm of the dust
To be in the plan at all !

WHAT IS THE WONDER?

No wonder the birds are so happy!

No wonder they feel so gay;

And so should we, if we lived in a tree,

Under cool, green leaves all day.

What wonder they wake up so early,

And carol so loud and sweet?

So might we, too, if we'd nothing to do

But sit and sing for our meat.

Why wouldn't the spiders like to spin

Fine webs on the garden floors?

We should like to spin, too, if we might do

All our spinning out of doors.

The bees hard at work in the clover?

H'm, they're only after treats!

"So busy," you say, "all the livelong day?"

Yes, but they just live on sweets!

Oh, well may the ferns look fair and fine,

In delicate green arrayed;

They've had naught to do, ever since they grew

But fan themselves in the shade.

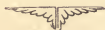
No wonder the daisies stand so straight,
All holding their heads just so;
All day in the air, with no thought or care,
And nothing to do but grow.

No wonder the runnels laugh so loud,
As they dance along the way;
So should we, too, if we'd nothing to do,
But run through the fields all day.

The giddy winds go a-gossiping,
Always telling all they know,
Then likely enough, go off in a huff —
All they ever do is — blow !

No wonder — ho, ho, just stop a bit !
No wonder you think, do you,
That the birds and bees and flowers and trees
Should do what they have to do ?

But I think we'll leave the wonder now
For the winds to tell the flowers;
They all do their best, with a happy zest —
Come, let us be doing ours !



RESTING IN THE OLD ARM CHAIR.

There is someone here in my home to-night,
Thank the good Father above,
Whose hair is now threaded all thro' with white,
Someone to cherish and love;
Her tender care I have never yet missed,
No; not for a day — a day
Since the hour my infant brow she kissed,
Long before her hair was gray.

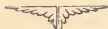
Resting, resting, so weary is she,
She with the soft white hair,
Long years ago, she used to rock me,
Now, she rests in the old arm chair.

'Tis the mother about whose side we flocked,
When the night was drawing nigh,
In the home where the cradle gently rocked,
To her tender lull-a-by;
It was there, she told of a home in heav'n,
There, she taught us of the way,
And prayed that the children God had given
Might never be led astray.

When the others went to the "Upper Fold,"
Long she grieved and sorrowed sore,
And now, holding her dear as heart can hold
I love for the other four;
There are lovelier homes than mine to-day
Whose pleasures I envy not,
Where an old arm chair has been set away,
Now vacant — perhaps forgot.

A mother sits here in my home to-night,
Thank the good Father above,
A mother, whose hair is fast growing white,
Is mine, to cherish and love —
Some count out their wealth in silver and gold,
And guard it with jealous care.
I'm richer than they, and yet all I hold
Rests here, in the old arm chair.

Resting, resting, so weary is she,
She with the soft white hair,
Long years ago, she used to rock me,
Now, she rests in the old arm chair.



THE SAINTS' MESSENGER.

If I knew it now, how strange it would seem,
To think, to know, ere another day
I should have passed over the silent way,
And my present life become as a dream;
But what if that step should usher me
Right into the sinless company
Of the saints in heaven.

I'll carefully watch the door of my lips
As I talk with my comrades to-day,
And think a little before I say,
To see that no careless expression slips,
Which I should find would so ill compare
With the holy converse uttered there,
By the saints in heaven.

If they let me in — oh, how sweet, how strange,
The thought, that before a new day dawn,
I may put the incorruptible on.
That beautiful garment, the robe of change !
And walk and talk with that happy throng,
Perhaps join my voice in the "new, new song,"
With the saints in heaven.

But I fear lest I should be poorly meet
To mingle much with the saints at all;
My earthly service would seem so small —
Just going of errands on tired feet;
But oh, how blest, if it were my share
To be the trusted messenger there,
For the saints in heaven !

With holy missives to take and bring,
Sometime, perhaps, it would come to be,
That some pure saint would commission me
To carry his message straight to the King:
And the King his answer would defer,
To turn and smile on the messenger
Of his saints in heaven !



A CRADLE SONG.

Rarest and fairest, sweetest and best,
I have a song-bird in a white nest;
The songs he sings, on bright little wings
Nestle down in my heart to rest.

Fairest and rarest; not to be sold;
The dearest darling a nest could hold;
Peek-a-bo-peep, and then go to sleep —
Some little birds are out in the cold.

Rarest and fairest — sleepest too —
My little song-bird has eyes of blue;
Sleep-ee-to-sleep, and no more bo-peep,
Till he awakes when other birds do.

KEPT.

Though beset and tempted by foes without,
And tortured within by dark fears and doubt—
Oft perplexed and troubled and tossed about,
Yet kept !

Though hindered or helped, relieved or tried,
To-day permitted, to-morrow denied,
Yet by the strong Presence I walk beside
Still kept !

When my feet down flowery paths would stray,
That would lead far off from the King's highway,
Back to the rugged path day after day
I'm kept.

Through the narrow defiles one treads alone,
When the lips are mute, while the heart makes moan,
And the way leads onward, untried, unknown,
I'm kept.

Down dim lonely valleys, up rocky steeps,
Where the thunders roll, and the tempest sweeps,
Still ever by Him who calms and keeps
I'm kept.

When the way seemed blocked by a solid wall,
And my feet stood still and my hands let fall,
My soul through the darkness that shuts out all
Was kept.

And then, when I wrestled in wild despair,
And so blindly beat at the barrier,
Still the poor soul that only moaned for prayer,
Was kept.

In the waiting-time when all strength was spent,
And with folded hands the days came and went,
Ah! then I learned what these two words meant—
“Just kept.”

I am learning slowly, and oh, 'tis sweet
To rise again on my rested feet,
And so toil on singing in glad repeat,
“I'm kept!”

Would I know all the way marked out for me,
As it winds away to the great gray sea?
No, oh, no! It is better far to be
So kept.

Just to know each day I am being led,
Only trusting the way that lies ahead,
Quite content with knowing each step I tread
Is kept.

And when I come down to life's farther strand,
When the first wave reaches me where I stand,
I shall then in the hollow of His hand
Be kept!

TO A CACTUS BLOOM.

Ye beauteous flower, marvellous hues,
With what wonderful light art thou imbued ?
Has an angel's breath, in a world of sin,
Stolen through thy petals to hide within ?
That thy crimson chalice is all aglow
With a light unknown to this world below ?
What is the sweet secret within thee sealed,
Which for man's entreaty thou wilt not yield ?
Some beautiful hint thou art, God-given,
To bloom on earth, with a tint of heaven,
Just caught from its pillars of amethyst,
To veil thy heart in a violet mist,
Lest the curious gaze of sinful men
Should fright thee back to thy heaven again.



AN OLD TREE'S SOLILOQUY.

I'm very cold; my boughs are almost bare;
For wind-sprites, busy in the autumn air,
Are stripping off my leaves; they grudge to spare
Even a few to nestle at my feet;
The birds that sang all thro' the summer time
Desert me now, to seek a sunnier clime,
Leaving me here alone, to meet the rime
And feel the sting of wintry wind, and sleet.

I'm very old; fast yielding to decay !
My topmost bough has fallen quite away,
A poor old broken tree that's had its day,
 I only stand here waiting for the end.
Alone — apart from other trees I've stood,
Denied the social joys of brotherhood,
Felt in the closer contact of the wood,
 Where trees converse together, friend with friend.

My last pale leaf goes drifting down the stream
Upon whose bank I stand, as in a dream,
And wonder how the cold dark waters seem,
 And if my little leaflet is afraid —
Strange premonitions haunt me like a pain;
The impulse that has thrilled in every vein
Is still; it means I shall not leaf again,
 No more will happy children seek my shade !

The little ones that used to come and play
Have changed, grown old, and some, infirm and gray,
Leaned on their staves awhile, and went away,
 So far away, they will not come again.
In my cool shade one often used to rest,
Who seemed to bear some sorrow on her breast,
She always turned her sad face to the west,
 As if there was the solace for her pain.

But that was long ago by some decades of years;
I've always hoped her faith outlived her fears,
That some sweet joy came to dry her tears,
 When sorrow's tender mission was fulfilled;

Since then, how many seasons have gone by,
Trailing their changes over earth and sky;
How many mortals have been born to die,
How many sweet bird-voices have been stilled !

The last lone nest that clung so close to me,
The wind has fretted till it's almost free,
And by a single straw hangs helplessly —
'Tis well its little tenants are away!
When they come back, and find the old tree gone,
Think you they'll miss the bough they built upon;
Or on some younger tree, sing to the dawn
As gay a carol, as they sang last May ?

They do not know, the pretty, flighty things,
That come and go at pleasure on swift wings,
How the fixed nature of an old tree clings
To those it keeps, a little while a year.
I loved them so ! 'Tis hard to yield them all,
The robin's song; the early bluebird's call —
Even the squirrel's chatter, in the fall,
Has always been a pleasant sound to hear.

How black the sky looks there above the hill
In the northwest; the air is strangely still;
I feel a strong presentiment of coming ill —
I wish I'd been a straighter, better tree !
And yet, what has a poor old tree to dread ?
Why lives the trunk, after its top is dead ?
My last green leaf has budded, and been shed,
I can but fall, what more can happen me ?

I'd choose to fall unnoticed, in the dark,
Before the cruel axe has rent my bark,
Leaving a pile of whitened chips, (to mark
Where once I stood) their own sad tale to tell.
A mighty shivering has seized my form;
I feel too weak to meet this rising storm,
I wonder if I ever shall — — — —
[Even as it spoke, the old tree groaned — and fell.]



TO MY COMRADES.

Oh, what shall I say to you comrades, mates;
To you with familiar faces,
Who have joined with mine, your lives and fates,
In the old accustomed places.
We have shared in common our hopes and fears,
And mingled our joys and sorrows;
Have bidden each other "good-nights" for years,
And "good-mornings" on the morrows.
To some we have said "good-by," and for aye;
They are gone past all returning —
While others have married and gone away,
New ways, and duties learning.
Sometimes we have seen our work thro' tears,
And upon each other's faces,
We have read the record of weary years,
Such as death alone erases.

Then again, we have shaken hands with fate,
And grown happy in our striving,
Till we've equaled perhaps, the learned and great,
In the joy of real living.

We have seen the growth in each other's souls,
Of worthy and true ambitions;
And with eyes still fixed upon distant goals,
Have fulfilled our humble missions.

We have kept thro' the busy mill's turmoil,
Our several likes and leanings,
And have drawn from our lives of earnest toil,
Many sweet and precious meanings.

You have all had your cherished hopes and plans
Laid away in hidden niches,
And I — O, comrades — under bans,
I'll own up to skipping stitches.

And here are a few, if you care to take
Sometime when you have the leisure;
I can only wish I had power to make
The "stitches" afford you pleasure.

But here is my hand to you, comrades, mates,
And since toil is our common creed,
I shall hope to meet you beyond the gates,
And I wish you all "Good-speed"!



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